

31st & Pearl

Blogged Down

One only needs to read her 28-Oct-07 blog about things to do on a glorious day to get the sense that new USM President Martha Saunders may not be ready for prime time. In the space of just a few sentences, Saunders lets everyone in the "Southern Miss family" know just how dreamy it is to be USM's President, and to be living in the mansion on Jamestown. She apparently had a big decision to make on 28-Oct-07 -- hang around Jamestown daydreaming about the grounds there, or head over to campus to enjoy the festivities surrounding the day's athletics events. Choices . . . choices -- she chose the latter.

That choice consisted of a women's volleyball match, in which the Lady Eagles lost (for the 18th time this year), and a football game, in which Central Florida took the Eagles out behind the proverbial woodshed in a 34-17 beating on national television. After what Saunders told the USM family (at her Fall 2007 Convocation) would be banner years for USM athletics, neither of these two teams has won more games (to date) than it has lost. Now, many USM fans have taken to calling her "Aunt Martha" on Internet message boards and in Internet chat rooms. Supporters and fans are begging for heads to roll, starting with head coach Jeff Bower and some of his top assistants.

The choice Saunders failed to make on 28-Oct-07 entailed spending the day in her office, figuring out how to move USM out of Tier IV and back into Tier III. That would have been a glorious day well spent. Other options also abound, like getting the CoB out of its AACSB difficulties. Even speaking with USM's Athletics Director about the current direction of USM's football program would have been a better move.

We don't know what future choices Saunders will make. We do know, however, that Saunders is a public relations-type by training (expertise), so her first instinct will be to put lipstick on the institution's problems and call it good. That's what PR-types do in their usual capacities, as PR-types. Now USM has one at the helm. That means, simply, that those in the "Southern Miss family" will have to be hyper-vigilant in watching over the institution they love so dearly so as not to be charmed by all the spin that one would expect from a PR machine.

31st & Pearl is a series housed at usmnews.net that features commentary on aspects of life in the CoB from a variety of columnists.